

# The Influence of Chinese and Western Culture on English-Chinese Translation

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## **Abstract**

With the progress of globalization, the cultural exchanges between the countries are becoming more and more frequent. The culture is created by long-term efforts and is the heritage of the society; the values are the core of the culture, and the different cultures can be distinguished according to different values. The difference in the way of geography, history and mode of thought leads to the heterogeneity of culture, which is called, cultural difference. The difference in the translation activity has the phenomenon of "lack of culture". This paper, based on the differences of the Chinese and western cultures, studies the translation methods and strategies used in the translation activities of the translator with different cultural background, and probes into the influence of the difference between the Chinese and the western culture on the translation.

**Key words:** Cultural; Language; Thinking Patterns; English-Chinese Translation; Translation Principle

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## **1. The Relationship Between Language and Culture**

Eugene Nida, a translation theorist, points out that translation is an exchange between two cultures. In the case of true successful translation, it is even more important to be familiar with the two cultures than to master the two languages, as the words are only meaningful in the cultural context. Therefore, translation and culture are closely related. Because of the nationality, the region and the times, if the culture is not taken into account in the translation process, the translation will not valid. Therefore, to study the translation, we must deal with the relationship between the language and the culture, pay attention to the cultural differences of different languages, and analyze the influence of the cultural differences on the translation.

### **1.1 The Definition of Language**

Language is the most important tool of human communication, and it is a variety of expressions for people to communicate. Language is one of the important characteristics of the nation, which preserves and transmits the achievements of human civilization. In general, every nation has its own language. Language is a medium for people to exchange ideas. It affects politics, economy, society, science, technology, and culture itself. Language as a cultural phenomenon is constantly developing.

### **1.2 The Definition of Culture**

Culture is a kind of social phenomenon, which is the product of people's long-term creation. The culture is also a historical phenomenon, which is the accumulation of the social history.

### **1.3 The Relationship Between Language and Culture**

Language and culture depend on each other and influence each other. Language is an important carrier of culture; culture restricts language. Language is an important part of culture. Without language, there can be no culture. Only through language can culture be passed on from generation to generation. Language is an important means of maintaining the way of life, and almost every cultural group has its own unique language. Culture is the sum of material wealth and spiritual wealth created by human beings in the process of social and historical development, while language is the external form of human thinking, through which people express rich thoughts in the heart and communicate with each other. Culture is the content of language, language is the carrier of culture, language and culture are inseparable. The differences between Chinese and Western cultures can be reflected from different aspects in their respective languages, and have a certain impact on the semantic understanding in the process of English-Chinese translation. Therefore, in English-Chinese translation activities, we must take into account the cultural differences between China and the West, fully understand the connotation of the original text from the perspective of their respective cultures, and adopt

appropriate semantic expressions to accurately translate the original text.

## **2 The Reasons of the differences between Chinese and Western Cultures**

### **2.1 Geographic reasons**

Since ancient times, China has a semi-closed continental geographical environment. On the contrary, western culture, origins from Greek Peninsula and its adjacent coastal areas, is an open marine geographical environment. Because of the different environment, the description of the natural geography is different, and the association caused by the natural geographical image and the extended meaning given by the natural geographical image are very different. For example: China faces the sea in the east and high mountains in the west, so in China, the east wind is the spring wind, and it is the symbol of warm. The west wind is bitter, the west wind is generally a bleak and sad representative. On the contrary, Britain's geographical environment is opposite to China. It is the Atlantic Ocean to the west, and the news of spring is the westerly wind, which is warm and appropriate in the hearts of the British people. Shelley's Ode to the West Wind is the eulogizing of the West Wind: "It's a warm wind, the west wind, full of bird's cries." When translating *A Dream of Red Mansions*, the British sinologist Hawkes made corresponding adjustments to the question of the east-west wind. Originally, the east wind sent warmth to the west wind to bring it warm, so that it could be closer to the cultural habits of western-style readers. Therefore, its translation is also more widely accepted in the West.

### **2.2 The Way of Thinking**

Chinese way of thinking is characterized by intuitive intuition. Chinese traditional thinking pays attention to practical experience and overall thinking. Therefore, by means of intuition, we can directly grasp the inner essence and law of the cognitive object through perception, that is, from the whole, the inner essence and law of the cognitive object can be directly grasped through perception. Intuitive thinking acquires overall perception and overall mastery directly and quickly through meditation, recognition, inspiration, epiphany, and lack of rigorous logical procedures. Emphasis on intuitive understanding, less on theoretical analysis. Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism all pay attention to intuitive understanding of the universe, and strive to achieve the realm of "heaven and earth is born with me, everything is one with me," and "heaven and man are one unity." In Chinese traditional philosophy, "the unity of heaven and man" as a most common, the most basic concept constitutes the basic content of the traditional mode of thinking. Traditional philosophy regards man and nature, human order and cosmic order, human body and society as an organic whole which is inseparable and affects each other. In this structure, the unity of body and mind, form and spirit, spirit and substance, thought and existence, subject and object, heaven and man, yin and yang, spirit and substance are inseparable unity. At the same time, Chinese people's thinking tends to

be concrete. One of the important features of Chinese traditional culture is that "still image" is reflected in the language organization, used to use sound, meaning, form of concrete thinking to create characters, the use of parataxis to enrich the content of vocabulary can feel, When expressing your thoughts, discuss the matter and give an example. Ancient Chinese people pay attention to the concept, figurative theory and analogy of "taking things from things" and "taking images and analogies".

By contrast, Westerners' emphasis on logical reasoning. Western thinking pays attention to science, rationality, analysis and demonstration, so it is necessary to know the essence and law of things in demonstration and deduction by means of logic. The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle pioneered formal logic, which gave western ways of thinking a series of characteristics, such as rationality, analysis, positivism, accuracy and systematic. In the 17th century, the English philosopher Bacon developed logic. The induction method was created, emphasizing observation, experience, fact, experiment and demonstration. Logical reasoning can actually be regarded as the passage and process of the western mode of thinking from deep mental structure to language superficial-conceptual structure. At the same time, Western thinking tends to abstract. Western culture inherits the cultural tradition of ancient Greece and Rome, and one of its important characteristics is thought. They emphasize the authenticity of space, express semantic information with strict change of part of speech, embody grammatical category, be good at talking about viewpoints, methods, principles and so on. In the process of understanding and analyzing the objective world, Westerners, with the ultimate purpose of exploring the origin of the world, and taking the classification method as the main means, try to put forward the common phase of such objects from the category of objects. At the same time, all kinds of objects and images are grouped together to form Plato's so-called "idea world", and all kinds of common images are often expressed in the form of linguistic symbols with the concept as the core.

### **2.3 Social Reasons**

Ancient Chinese economy is self-sufficient and in small-scale which occupies the dominant position for a long time, and the stable feudal system plays an important role in the formation of Chinese cultural thinking. The core and essence of Chinese cultural thinking is Confucianism. The knowledge of the world, represented by Confucianism, is not based on curiosity about the mystery of nature, but from the concern of the feudal society and ethics. The commercial development of western maritime industry has aroused great interest of ancient Greek philosophers in astronomy, meteorology, geometry, physics and mathematics, and has gradually formed a scientific tradition in the west that pays attention to the exploration of natural mysteries. Under the guidance of Bacon that knowledge is power, exploring nature and conquering nature become the primary goal. Therefore, in the context of social customs, the cultural differences between China and the West are particularly prominent.

### 3. Principles Observed in Translation

#### The Principle of Seeking Common Ground in Different Ways

Nida points out that the highest standard of translation is to achieve full equivalence between the translation and the source language. However, it is difficult to achieve. Faced with the objective cultural differences in translation, translators should strive to achieve differences and seek common ground. In view of the cultural differences between China and the West, the author suggests that the direct translation of Chinese and English sentences with the same lexical meaning and cultural meaning can be translated directly without hesitation. For example, "三思而后行" is translated as "think twice before you act"; for sentences with the same lexical meaning but different cultural meaning, the alternative translation method can be used, that is, to replace the words in the source language with words with the same cultural meaning in the target language. For example, "It is a good horse that never stumbles", this kind of sentence is from the positive thinking, translation should be from the negative thinking, that is, the use of anti-translation method. The that-guided clause source text should translate the positive into the negative and the negative into the positive. If the above sentence should be translated as "the best horse will miss the hoof." It is impossible to translate properly without paying attention to the differences of thinking patterns in culture, and the combination of phonology and meaning should be adopted in the case of lexical meaning and the absence of cultural meaning. Translators should proceed from the transliteration and the free translation in order to achieve the best translation. For example, "I know,Dad", she said, "I'm a selfish pig." I'll think about it". It is incomprehensible to say that someone is a pig in Chinese, especially if a girl claims to be a pig. So, she said, "I know, Dad," she said, "I'm selfish, it's stupid;" But I'll think about it. " You can replace "pig" with "stupid". In this way, we can basically achieve the correct transmission of cultural information, that is, "seek common ground in differences".

### 4. Conclusion

In short, the problem of cultural differences is rich in content and extremely complex. In order to transfer between Chinese and English, the translator must not only know the characters of the two countries, but also have profound cultural skills and profound understanding of the differences between the two cultures. Only in this way, can we not only achieve linguistic equivalence, but also achieve true cultural equivalence.

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